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## Pronunciation

### A short introduction

The pronunciation of Old English has been carefully worked out by a process of historical and comparative research. In the overview here, many linguistic facts have been omitted, but further distinctions and fine tunings will be made in the course of the book. For those interested in phonetics, some further reading on the sounds of the language will be given at the end of the book.

The following is a **quick guide** to sounding broadly correct. It is important to learn the basic sounds of the language, so that the texts and poems can be read fluently and with their original rhythmical effects. In addition, once the basic sounds are learnt the connections with modern English become much clearer and the language is much easier to learn.

In the vocabularies, the Old English is given in **bold**, the meaning in *italics*. Where appropriate a rough pronunciation based on modern English is indicated by inverted commas: e.g. **rice** *kingdom* ‘ree-cheh’.

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The basic rule is to pronounce every letter as written, including **-e** on the end of words. The letters **þ** and **ð** were pronounced as modern ‘th’; **g** adjacent to **e** or **i** becomes a ‘yuh’ sound and **ic** is ‘itch’. Vowels sound very like those in modern English: pat, pet, pit, pot, put, or like continental European vowels when lengthened; **ea** is a one-syllable ‘e-a’.

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### A reference guide for later study

Further details on pronunciation are given below and these are pages to which you should return frequently for reference purposes. However, it is suggested that you do at least the first three units of the book before you study the details below any further.

Many consonants sounded as in modern English: **b, p, t, d, l, r, w, m, n, x**.

The consonants **f, s** and **þ** have two pronunciations:

- ▶ *Initially and finally they sound like ‘f’, ‘s’ and ‘th’ in ‘thin’.*
- ▶ *In the middle of a word, between vowels, they take on the voiced pronunciation: ‘v’, ‘z’ and ‘th’ in ‘that’.*

Thus **heofon** and **freosan** sound more like their modern equivalents *heaven* and *freeze* than they might appear at first sight and the medial **-þ-** will sound like ‘th’ in ‘bathing’, not like the voiceless ‘th’ in ‘mathematics’.

The letter **c** represents ‘k’ in **cyning** *king* and **candel** *candle*, but when adjacent to the vowels **e** and **i** in **ceap** *goods*, **cild** *child* and **cirice** *church* or names in **-ic** like **Ælfric** and **Godric**, it had the modern ‘ch’ sound. Similarly **g** is ‘g’ in **god** *good* but becomes a ‘y’ sound in **gif** *if* ‘yif’ and **geong** *young* ‘yeong’ and **dæg** *day* ‘dæy’. In the middle of words, such as **boga** *bow*, **g** later came to be pronounced ‘w’, but in the Old English period it was pronounced like a Dutch ‘g’ or a German voiced ‘ach’ sound heard in north German ‘sagen Sie’. The letter combination **cg** is equivalent to the modern spelling *dge*; thus **ecg** and **brycg** sound very like modern *edge* and *bridge*. Similarly, **sc** is the digraph for ‘sh’ as in **scip** *ship*, pronounced ‘ship’.

In the middle of words **h** sounded like the medial **-ch-** in German **Sicht** while in final position it sounded like the ‘-ch’ in Scottish ‘Loch Ness’.

The letter **a** represents a back vowel like ‘a’ in ‘psalm’. It contrasts with the front vowel spelt **æ**, pronounced as in southern English or standard American ‘man’.

There are two diphthongs, written **ea** and **eo**. Again, each letter should be pronounced, but the tongue should glide quickly from one vowel to the next so that the diphthong remains one syllable.

Each vowel and diphthong has a short and long sound. The long vowel has the same quality of sound as the short vowel; the difference is basically one of extension: the short vowel is drawled out to make it long. Listen carefully for long vowels in the recordings. In Old English, the word **is** with a short vowel (pronounced roughly as ‘iss’) means *is*, whereas **is** with a long vowel (pronounced ‘ees’) means *ice*. Similarly, note the difference between the short vowels in **mann** *person*, **full** *full* and **god** *god* compared with the long vowels in **man** *evil*, **ful** *foul* and **god** *good*, pronounced ‘mahn’, ‘fool’ and ‘goad’ respectively.

Sometimes the scribes marked length with an accent, e.g. **ís** and **gód**, but this was done only occasionally and often inconsistently. Especially for poetic texts, many modern textbooks of Old English employ a macron over the long vowel, e.g. **īs** and **gōd**. In keeping with the aim of this book to present texts unencumbered and with minimal adaptation, macrons will not be used in the study texts of the units. In explanations, however, occasional use of the macron will mark the long vowels of words like **īs** and **gōd**. Attention to long vowels helps to make connections with modern English, and is particularly important when reading the **poetry**, where precise distinctions of length are necessary for the correct study of the metre of the poems.

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## Insight

Most traditional textbooks of Old English are arranged as a systematic grammar, covering separately pronouns, adjectives, nouns, verbs and sentence structure, all in a set order: in verbs, for instance, the full rules of the present tense are taught before those of the past tense, regular verbs are given before irregular, and so on. There is a rationale to this, but as one 19th-century educationist put it, ‘Would you teach dancing by giving rules for dancing and keeping the learner fixed in his seat?’ (Joseph Payne, *Monthly Journal of Education* 1874, p. 306).

Language learning is a skill or an integrated set of skills. Even though each element can (and should, to a certain extent)

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be taught separately, when you actually experience the language, by reading a text, say, all its elements, from its sounds and spellings to its pronouns, verbs and case-endings to its vocabulary and phraseology, are present simultaneously. Keeping this in mind, you will see that each unit in this book takes as a basis a certain type of text or genre, such as a chronicle entry, a riddle or a king's declaration, and teaches some essentials for reading that particular text in context. The aim is to provide an integrated approach to the learning of the language.

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# Here Edward was consecrated as king

This unit will cover:

texts

- *the coronation of Edward the Confessor as reported in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

first steps in reading Old English

- *word recognition*
- *pronunciation*
- *spelling*

vocabulary

- *introduction to personal names*

## TR 1

Her wæs Eadward gehalgod to cinge  
*Here Edward was consecrated as king*

## The use of English

In 1040 Edward the atheling – prince and heir to the throne – returned to England after twenty-four years of exile on the Continent. Two years later he succeeded to the throne of England

and in the following year the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports that Edward was consecrated king at *Winchester on the first Easter Day with great honour*.



Edward the Confessor, as he came to be called by his successors, ruled a stable and prosperous England for twenty-four years. Yet during his lifetime, the country became subject to a bewildering variety of cultural influences: from Norse and Anglo-Danish to Norman and French. One constant in all this period of change was the large and central role played by the Old English language in the political, literary and spiritual life of the country. Unlike most of Europe at this time, where Latin was the only written language in use, England had developed a considerable literature in the vernacular, and much of its everyday administration was also conducted through the medium of written English.

### **The C version of the Chronicle**

It so happened that a new version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was started around the time of Edward's accession. The Chronicle was a year-by-year record of the nation's affairs probably begun in the time of king Alfred in the ninth century. The new recension of the 1040s, known as version C, was made perhaps at Abingdon

Abbey or at an ecclesiastical centre in Mercia, the Midland region of Anglo-Saxon England. The compiler copied the earlier Chronicle up to his own day and then began entering new records in the annual list of events. By adding his own stories, he was essentially acting as a contemporary observer of political events. The following short Old English text is his own, typically brief, account of the coronation of 1043.

» TR 1, 00:20

## The year 1043

1043      Her wæs Eadward gehalgod to cinge on Wincestre on forman Easterdæg mid myccelum wyrðsype, and ða wæron Eastron .iii. *Nonas Aprilis*. Eadsige arcebisceop hine halgade, and toforan eallum þam folce hine wel lærde, and to his agenre neode and ealles folces wel manude. And Stigant preost wæs gebletsad to bisceope to Eastenglum.

AD 1043      *Here Edward was consecrated as king at Winchester on the first Easter Day with great honour, and that year Easter fell on the third of the nones of April. Archbishop Eadsige consecrated him, and before all the people instructed him well, and for his own need and that of all the people admonished him well. And the priest, Stigand, was blessed as bishop to the East Angles.*

## Insight

The phrase **mid myccelum wyrðsype** meaning *with great honour* is much closer to modern English than it might first appear. Remember that the letter ð (called ‘eth’) represents a modern ‘th’ and that sc is modern ‘sh’. The last word is therefore the compound *worth-ship*, the origin of the modern word *worship*.

🔊 **TR 2** [*listen again with a translation*]

## Strategies for reading Old English

(a) The first strategy to employ when tackling a text written in an **inflected** language like Old English is to mark up (with hyphens or by underlining) the **inflections**, i.e. all the endings which the language uses to mark grammatical meanings in the text; it is useful also to highlight the root or stem of each word by marking any prefixes. An example of an ending is **-e** on **cing** *king*, a prefix **ge-** occurs before **halgod** *hallowed, consecrated*; in the same word the **-od** ending corresponds to the modern ending *-ed*.

(b) Try doing a literal word-for-word translation of the text. This helps to understand the structure of the language.

(c) Next, hear the text read out loud on the recording (or by someone familiar with the language); this will help with comprehension. Many words (e.g. **Easterdæg**) become instantly recognizable once they are heard and the connections between Old and modern English start to emerge. Using the guide to pronunciation (in the introduction) you can also try reading out loud on your own; it is possible to learn to pronounce the basics of Old English surprisingly quickly. At first, remember that **ð**, **þ** represent the modern 'th' sound in 'thorn'. Next, careful attention should be paid to the letter-sound correspondences of **æ**, **g**, **c**, **cg** and **sc**.

(d) Start observing the patterns of the language: its frequent meaningful endings, its word order, its typical modes of expression and idioms. When reading texts from the Chronicle for instance, you will soon find that a typical word-order is *Here was Edward... Here commanded the king..., Here came Cnut...* etc. As you gradually acquire more knowledge of the rules of grammar, this may seem less necessary, but in fact a good habit of observation is always essential: it will strengthen your grasp



of the language and enrich your knowledge of the resources of the language.

(e) One further option is to experiment with transcribing the text in a slightly modernized spelling, in order to become familiar with the form and shape of the words. An example would be transcribing **Wincestre** as **Winchestre**.

» **TR 3** [*listen again, phrase by phrase, with a translation*]

### Reading strategies in practice

Taking a sentence at a time, we can apply the above strategies to our text from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

#### Highlight inflections and prefixes

Her wæs Eadward ge-halg-od to cing-e on Wincestr-e on forma-n  
Easterdæg mid myccel-um wyrð-scype.

#### Do a literal translation

*Here was Edward hallowed to king on Winchester on former  
Easterday with mickle (i.e. great) worthship.*

The literal translation can then be turned into natural modern English:

*Here Edward was consecrated as king at Winchester on the first  
Easter Day with great honour.*

#### Pronounce out loud

Pronounce every letter and syllable. For finer points, use the pronunciation guide in the introduction; the following are some hints:

**Her:** pronounce ‘hayr’ with a long, close vowel like French *été*.  
The long vowel points to its later modern form *here*.

**wæs:** the letter *æ* represents a medium-low front vowel like ‘-a-’ in standard English ‘cat’.

**Eadward:** ‘Aird-ward’.

**ge-halgod:** pronounce ‘yuhHALgod’ (note that the capital letters represent the stressed syllable); make the **a** a long back vowel. The **g** was a guttural or fricative like in Dutch, but a later pronunciation was ‘w’, which perhaps makes the connection with modern English *hallowed* more obvious.

**to:** rhymes with ‘tow’ not with ‘too’.

**-dæg:** ‘dæi’ (glide from the ‘æ’ to the ‘ih’ sound). To British ears this may sound rather like an Australian ‘G’day!’.

**myccelum:** ‘MÜTCH-eh-lum’ (pronounce *y* as French ‘u’ or German ‘ü’).

**wyrðscype:** ‘WÜRTH-shih-peh’ (*sc* sounds like modern English ‘sh’).

#### 🔊 TR 4 [listen again]

### Observe linguistic patterns

Note the word order: *here was Edward hallowed...* In present-day English the natural sequence is to place *Edward* before the verb *was hallowed*, but Old English often placed the verb in second position with the subject following.

Observe also the use of the prepositions *to*, *on*, *mid*. In Old English it was natural to say that someone was *hallowed to king* rather than *as king*; the preposition still makes perfect sense in modern English, but the idiom is no longer used. From the evidence of this sentence, note also the use of *on* + location in the phrase *on Winchester*, as well as *on* + time in *on Easter Day*.

### Experiment with modernized spellings

Try modernizing the spelling, replacing *þ* and *ð* with *th*, soft *c* with *ch*, soft *g* with *y* or *i*, and medial guttural *g* with *w*:

Her wæs Edward i-halwod to kinge on Winchestre on forman  
Easterdæi mid michelum worthshipe.

If you transcribe the text on these principles, it begins to ‘look like’ English, or at the very least like a kind of Middle English, and the exercise helps you to become familiar with the orthography or spelling system of Old English.

### Insight

The words **biscop** *bishop* and **preost** *priest* are originally Greek **epi-skopos** (literally *over-seer*) and **presbuteros** (*elder*) borrowed into the Church Latin of Rome as *episcopus* and *presbyter*, and then into the older Germanic languages when these came into contact with the late Roman empire. The earlier a word is borrowed or taken into the language, the more thoroughly it is assimilated, and takes on a new phonetic identity.

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## Cultural contexts

In contrast to the relative peace and stability of his period of rule, Edward the Confessor’s earlier life had been far from secure. Born in about 1005 at Islip near Oxford on an estate later owned by his mother, Emma of Normandy, he grew up in a country devastated by Viking wars and divided by the alleged misrule of his father Æthelred ‘the Unready’. In 1009, for instance, Oxford, an important trading port on the old border of Wessex and Mercia, was burned to the ground. In 1013–14 the Danes seized power and the royal family fled abroad. The following year the situation was reversed and, though still a young boy, Edward was sent back to England on a mission to negotiate with the Council for his father’s return to power. But in 1016 Æthelred died and the Danish Cnut became king. As the new Anglo-Danish dynasty consolidated its power Edward again fled the country for refuge with his Norman relatives.

As a modern biographer and historian has pointed out, Edward was probably resigned to the life of an exile and may never have expected to succeed to the throne when he did. There are some

hints about this in our source text. The Chronicle text for the year 1043 suggests that archbishop Eadsige made a special point of instructing the king in his royal duties. Perhaps he thought that Edward was unprepared for the greatness that had been thrust upon him, and possibly the archbishop was concerned about Edward's reputation as a son of Æthelred the Unready.

## Insight

Edward's father is known to history as Ethelred the Unready – a modernization of the personal name **Æþelræd** and the negative byname **Unræd** given him by others (though presumably not in the presence of the king himself). The word **ræd** means *advice* or *counsel* and **æþel** means *noble*, whereas **un-** is the negative prefix. So **Æþelræd Unræd** is a pun; it is a later, negative assessment of the reign of the 'ill-advised king'.

It would be intriguing to know the content of archbishop Eadsige's speech before the king and people at the coronation. One text that we can be fairly certain was used at the ceremony was the Old English coronation oath, the same oath that Edward's father Æthelred had sworn many years before, in AD 978 (for the text, see Unit 22). It is possible that the king repeated the words of the oath after the archbishop. But Eadsige probably had more to say than simply this. The chronicler's choice of the past tense verbs **lærde** and **manude** (*instructed* and *admonished*) is reminiscent of opening formulas from sermons and it is likely that the archbishop preached a set-piece sermon on that solemn occasion. The most influential writer of political sermons in this period was archbishop Wulfstan, a prominent churchman and administrator of the previous generation. His writings were in widespread circulation through the eleventh century and it is perhaps one of these that Eadsige used for his sermon. An ideal text for his purposes would have been archbishop Wulfstan's so-called *Institutes of Polity*, a treatise on the duties of all the ranks of society, with a recommendation that the king should be a shepherd of the people and *carefully keep God's commands and frequently seek out wisdom with the Council*

(a pointed critique of Æthelred, one is tempted to think). (For a full translation of this passage from the *Institutes of Polity*, see Michael Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, in the **bibliography**.)

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## Reading

In the reading section of each unit you are invited to read and browse through some passages supplementary to the main study texts of the unit. The reading texts are chosen for similarity of theme, outlook or vocabulary, but it is not necessary to understand every word or study them intensively.

### The opening words of an 11th-century sermon

Leofan men, ure Drihten, ælmihtig God, us þus singallice manað and læreð þurh his ða halgan bec þæt we riht and soð don her on worulde in urum life.

*Dearly beloved, our Lord, almighty God, thus continually admonishes and instructs us through his holy books that we should do right and truth here in this world in our life.*

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## Old English personal names

In the early Middle Ages, most men and women simply had one name. This meant that many people tended to have the same name, with obvious potential for confusion, although **byname**s or even nicknames were used to distinguish them. Sometimes a set of related names tended to run in an important family. This is certainly true of the West Saxon royal dynasty, in which a recurrent name element is **Ead-** (modern English *Ed-*), found in the tenth-century kings **Eadmund**, **Eadred**, **Eadwig**, **Eadgar**, **Eadward**.

The common type of Old English personal name is referred to as **dithematic** because, like a compound, it is made up of two meaningful words put together. Thus the name **Eadward** consists of two elements, **ead** *blessed* + **weard** *guardian*, an apt name for a man intended to be a *shepherd of the people*.

A typical woman's name **Godgifu** pronounced 'GOD-yi-vuh' (later spelling **Godiva**) consists of **god** *god* + **gifu** *gift*. In the following table (**Test Yourself (2)**), most of the elements can be combined productively to give common Old English names.

## TEST YOURSELF (1)

Using the instructions as a guide, apply some of the reading strategies outlined above to the remaining two sentences from the text. Some suggested answers for the exercise will be found in the **Test Yourself answers** at the back of the book.

- 1 Eadsige arcebisceop hine halgade, and toforan eallum þam folce hine wel lærde, and to his agenre neode and ealles folces wel manude.
- 2 And Stigant preost wæs gebletsad to bisceope to Eastenglum.

### Tasks:

- a do a very literal translation first
- b then retranslate into idiomatic, natural-sounding English
- c identify potential pronunciation difficulties involving þ, ð, æ, c, g, cg and sc
- d make a note of any patterns you can observe in the language of the text, such as use of prepositions (e.g. *to*, *for*), or frequent endings on words or word order
- e transcribe the first sentence with a modernized spelling; omit any endings you can.

## TEST YOURSELF (2)

### Making names

Identify five famous men and five women among the names in the tables below. Check your results in the **Test Yourself answers** at the back of the book. For help, consult the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* or Stenton (1998).

#### Men's names

first element	second element
<b>ælf</b> <i>supernatural, elf</i>	<b>gar</b> <i>spear</i>
<b>æpel</b> <i>noble</i>	<b>heah</b> <i>high</i>
<b>ead</b> <i>blessed</i>	<b>ræd</b> <i>advice</i>
<b>eald</b> <i>old</i>	<b>ric</b> <i>powerful</i>
<b>god</b> <i>god</i>	<b>sige</b> <i>victory</i>
<b>leof</b> <i>dear</i>	<b>stan</b> <i>stone</i>
	<b>weard</b> <i>guardian</i>
	<b>wine</b> <i>friend</i>

As either first or second element: **beorht** *bright*, **os** *god*, **wig** *battle*, **wulf** *wolf*.

#### Women's names

first element	second element
<b>ælf</b> <i>supernatural, elf</i>	<b>flæd</b> <i>beauty (used only in names)</i>
<b>æpel</b> <i>noble</i>	<b>gifu</b> <i>gift</i>
<b>ead</b> <i>blessed</i>	<b>þryþ</b> <i>power</i>
<b>god</b> <i>god</i>	<b>gyð</b> <i>battle</i>
<b>wyn</b> <i>joy</i>	